

## In The Nation

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### The Nonpartisan Nature of Influence Peddling

By ARTHUR KROCK

WASHINGTON, Oct. 23—Of all the promises of political party platforms, the one most regularly made and most seldom redeemed is to prevent influence peddling and kindred violations of high official ethics. The Kennedy Administration, like its immediate and earlier predecessors, learned this fact the hard way in several painful instances.

One was provided by the secretary of the Democratic Senate majority, Robert F. Baker, whose sideline business activities in getting Government space contractors to install vending machines in which he was interested were so successful and lucrative that a Senate group is now reluctantly examining this miracle of salesmanship. The second instance was supplied by Navy Secretary Fred Korth. His benevolent interest in the prosperity of the Fort Worth bank he left (and plans to rejoin) impelled him to offer, on Navy stationery, to help land rich new depositors by giving them cruises down the Potomac in his official vessel, the Sequoia, in company with persons whose names would impress the folks back home.

It may be contended that there is no factor of influence peddling in the solicitation by a Cabinet officer or representatives of corporations doing business with the Government to buy tickets to a testimonial dinner for a Senator whose re-election the Administration greatly desires. But the Representative Oliver Bolton of Ohio, who today attributed that action to Secretary of Labor Wirtz, the factor is strongly present. Though this kind of bite on business is old stuff in Washington, a great many will agree with Bolton.

On Wirtz's behalf it was said today that he sees nothing unethical in lending his name to a shakedown by lobbyists who otherwise would most unlikely to feel the urge to tell Senator Williams of New Jersey truthfully, and his re-election aspirations at the same time. This attitude Wirtz differs so flatly from the Secretary of the Interior who, in somewhat comparable circumstances a year or so ago as to suggest growing ethical insensitiveness in the Kennedy Administration. After seeing a copy of a shake-

down letter to the oil industry in which a lobbyist cited the Secretary as a sponsor, unwisely did nothing about it. But when the letter was made public, Udall penitently conceded that he had allowed himself to appear in the role of an influence peddler.

#### Platform Pledge

In the Democratic platform of 1960, the conventional pledge appeared in these familiar words: "The Democratic Administration will establish and enforce a Code of Ethics to maintain the full dignity and integrity of the Federal service. . . . And, with several ethical lapses during the Eisenhower Administration in mind—particularly the letters on Air Force stationery, and the phone calls from his office, in which Secretary Talbott tried to get customers for a business that, like the bank from which Korth retired to enter Government and to which he arranged to return, he was financially interested—the Los Angeles platform piously continued:

"We have drifted into a national mood that accepts payola and quiz scandals, tax evasion and false expense accounts, soaring crime rates [and] influence-peddling in high Government circles. . . . The new Democratic administration will help create a sense of national purpose. . . .

This "new Democratic administration" did not end the "quiz scandals"; that was a belated act of self-preservation by a shaken industry. It has really cracked down as promised on "tax evasion and false expense accounts." And its only share of blame for "soaring crime rates" is contributed by the leniency of Democratic law officers toward juvenile urban criminals among groups affiliated with their party at the polls.

But three of the recent incidents involving Democratic "influence peddling" demonstrate not only that its charge is nonpartisan, but that the Administration "enforced" the 1960 platform pledge only in the case of Korth. A Republican, Senator Williams of Delaware, pushed the Baker case to the stage of Senate inquiry. And there is no sign as yet that the President does not agree with his Secretary of Labor about the ethics of his role in the solicitation of lobbyists to finance a testimonial dinner in the political interests of the Administration.

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